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Washington D.C. - Congressman Dan Lungren (R-CA) released the following statement in response to the sentencing of two American journalists in North Korea:

"Laura Ling, whose family lives in my congressional district, was sentenced last weekend to 12 years hard labor. Laura suffers from a medical condition, which could put her life in jeopardy should she be forced to serve out this undue punishment."

"To date, very little information has been made available regarding the nature of her trial and the crimes of which she was convicted. I can only assume that she did not have the benefit of counsel, either before or during her trial. I only know that she was convicted of "grave crimes," but the North Korean Government has not specified what those crimes are. Equally disturbing is that observers were not permitted to attend the trial, which means we have no access to information about the trial other than that which has been selectively filtered through the North Korean press.

"Given the timing of their arrest, it would appear that Laura Ling and her colleague, journalist Euna Lee, are not criminals, as the DPRK alleges, but rather convenient political hostages. It is my hope that the DPRK will not exploit the capture and arrest of these two young women as it seeks to avoid sanctions stemming from its violations of international law.

"I recognize that the DPRK does not have a stellar record when it comes to the protection of human rights of its own citizens, much less foreigners who come in contact with the North

Korean Guard. Nevertheless, North Korea has acceded to a number of international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), under which those charged with a criminal offense have certain inalienable rights.

"Laura Ling and Euna Lee have the right to be informed - in detail - of the nature and cause of the charges against them. They have the right to have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of their defense, and to communicate with counsel of their own choosing in a language they understand.

"They have the right to confront and examine the witnesses against them. And they have the right not to be coerced into a confession. (ICCPR, Article 10). My office has been in frequent contact with the US Department of State, and the facts released thus far indicate that Laura Ling and Euna Lee were denied these fundamental rights.

"As the United States is a recent member of the UN Human Rights Council, I would beseech our Representative, as well as the other Member States serving on the Council, to condemn in the strongest terms these patent violations of the rights of journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee.

"I have requested that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton investigate this matter to ensure that the rights of Laura Ling and Euna Lee as citizens of the United States are upheld.

"I support the efforts of my colleague Rep. Ros-Lehtinen to introduce legislation that would make the lifting of restrictions against the North Korean government contingent upon, among other things, the release and safe return of Laura Ling and Euna Lee.

"Today I join with my colleague Rep. Ed Royce in asking President Obama to take urgent action on behalf of Laura Ling and Euna Lee and to pursue every avenue to secure their release."

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Congressman Dan Lungren serves as Ranking Member on the House Administration Committee in addition to serving on the Judiciary and Homeland Security committees